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TO: Deputy Director (Intelligence)  
SUBJECT: Speculations on the Soviet Leadership Situation

The attached paper discusses three hypotheses, presented independently, relating to the Soviet leadership problem. It is possible that a combination of the first and third of these hypotheses may be emerging. In such a situation, Khrushchev would remain pre-eminent and would doubtless continue his efforts to place his followers in important positions, but, at the same time, the other top members of the hierarchy, such as Bulganin, Kaganovich, and Mikoyan, would occupy key party and government offices serving as a tempering influence on Khrushchev.

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Speculations on the Soviet Leadership Situation

I. Developments within the Soviet Union during the past few months suggest that barring some dramatic turn of events, Party Secretary Khrushchev will become practically impregnable after the 20th Party Congress next February.

\* \* \*

Khrushchev has made almost continuous progress in strengthening his position since Stalin's death. He, of course, reaped much of the harvest from the elimination of Beria and the demotion of Malenkov, and he executed a sizable coup by getting himself elected as first secretary of the party. Since Malenkov's ouster, Khrushchev has continued to press forward--seemingly making key decisions with increasing confidence and even arbitrariness, and there have been practically no signs of opposition, even to his most controversial policies. Equally important is the fact that no other Soviet leader has appeared to be able to compete with Khrushchev over the question of personnel appointments.

Here then are some of the steps that Khrushchev has undertaken in the recent past to strengthen his hold:

1. At least two of four new deputy chairmen of the USSR Council of Ministers appointed in February (P. P. Lobanov and V. A. Kucherenko) seem to be in sympathy with Khrushchev's methods and policies.
2. In early March 1955 a shake-up in the agricultural ministries occurred, with A. I. Kozlov removed as minister of state farms. (Kozlov had a long record of association with Malenkov and had been personally criticized by Khrushchev on more than one occasion.)
3. The recall of L. G. Melnikov from the Soviet embassy in Rumania to head the newly created Ministry of Construction of the Coal Industry, announced on 8 April, can probably be traced to Khrushchev, who was Melnikov's predecessor as first secretary of the Ukrainian party.
4. Khrushchev's hand can be seen in the removal of D. N. Melnik, whom he criticized at the January 1955 party plenum, from the post of secretary of the Primorye Krai party

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organizations. It can also be seen in N. N. Shatalin's removal from his powerful position as secretary of the central committee and transfer to the far-distant Primorye post. Shatalin had been concerned, as secretary, with party personnel appointments and probably also with party supervision of the police apparatus, and his removal from the secretariat almost certainly signified a tightening of Khrushchev's grip on the party.

5. It seems possible that Khrushchev took a personal part in the promotion to marshal's rank of a number of Soviet generals, at least two of whom, Grechko and Moskalenko, had previously served with him.

6. Appointments made at the July 1955 plenum of the central committee have been generally interpreted as a sign of Khrushchev's growing strength. The plenum added two new members--A. I. Kirichenko and M. A. Suslov--to the party presidium. It also named three additional central committee secretaries--A. B. Aristov, N. I. Belyayev, and D. T. Shepilov. Khrushchev's past connections with Kirichenko and Shepilov seem to add up to another case in point.

7. During August, internal developments were highlighted by shifts, seemingly under Khrushchev's aegis, of a number of republic and local party officials. The most noteworthy change appeared to be the replacement of A. N. Yegorov as first secretary of the Karelo-Finnish central committee by L. I. Lyubennikov. Yegorov was probably a Malenkov appointee. In addition, the post of Kazakh first secretary, which had been vacant since Ponomarenko's transfer to Poland as ambassador in May, was filled by promoting the incumbent second secretary, L. I. Brezhnev, seemingly a Khrushchev adherent.

Also in August, I. A. Serov, chief of the Committee of State Security, KGB, was promoted to general of the army and decorated with the Order of Lenin (his second within a year). Serov was appointed in April 1954 as chairman of the newly formed KGB, attached to the Council of Ministers. His first recorded assignment was as people's commissar of internal affairs in the Ukraine, and as of April 1940 he was a member of the Ukrainian politburo under First Secretary N. S. Khrushchev. Serov's association with Khrushchev may have been important both in his selection as head of the KGB and in his later promotion.

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8. In succeeding weeks a series of replacements were announced in the leadership of several provincial and republic party organizations, many of which may well have been instigated by Khrushchev. During this same period, V. M. Matskevich, a known crony of Khrushchev, was confirmed as minister of agriculture, filling a long vacancy and ending speculation that Khrushchev was not strong enough to get his man into this key slot.

The foregoing developments taken together form an impressive array of Khrushchev accomplishments in the personnel field. If the pattern continues, other similarly impressive gains over personnel may take place before the party congress. If, indeed, this becomes the case, Khrushchev might be able to control the selection of the new central committee which will be elected by the congress. Control of the central committee would probably ensure his control of the party presidium.

Within the present presidium, Khrushchev does not seem to be facing strong opposition. Bulganin, who was nominated by Khrushchev for the position of chairman of the Council of Ministers, seems content to play a supporting role. Mikoyan acts as if he fully approves the current state of affairs. Malenkov has been demoted to a second-rate position in the government and his once powerful voice in the presidium now seems to be all but silenced. (The recently announced trial and execution of Georgian security officials may have been intended as a symbolic warning to Malenkov, inasmuch as it hinted that a new attitude may be developing toward some of the victims of the Great Purges and that officials most closely associated with those purges, like Malenkov, may now be in for a hard time.)

As for Molotov, he has been relegated to the position of an ideological deviationist, whose replacement, both as foreign minister and as a member of the party presidium, might well occur at any time. His position also suffers because there do not appear to be any other "forces" within the party hierarchy to support Molotov's "Stalinist" orientation in foreign affairs, and thus his replacement may have only been postponed until one of the larger, more "democratic" bodies, such as the party congress, can hear his "resignation."

Other forces must be taken into consideration. The army, for instance, might act as a road block to Khrushchev. Yet the officer corps is probably in a better position under Khrushchev and Bulganin than they were under Malenkov. They

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probably are more satisfied over military budget allocations and they are probably pleased with the high prestige status which they are being accorded. Marshal Zhukov, undoubtedly the man to contend with in the military, is prominently associated with the policies of the regime and with the activities of the top leaders. Marshal Konev, with ties to Khrushchev, may have been placed close to the center of the military scene to protect the politicians' best interests.

If the army seems to be neutralized, then the secret police certainly appears to be more so. In fact, there have been no indications since Beria's removal that the police retain their earlier influence in the Soviet political situation.

Finally, there is the question of possible opposition to Khrushchev's economic policies, particularly the corn and new lands programs. Although skepticism toward these schemes is probably increasing, it must be remembered that the new lands program helped considerably to augment the 1954 harvest, and the corn program, despite initial failures, is only beginning its second year. These then may prove to be sufficient reasons to warrant the continuation of the corn and new lands programs for at least another year, and another year may be time enough for Khrushchev to make sure that his future policies are put into effect unopposed.

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II. Recent developments suggest that opposition forces within the party hierarchy are coalescing in order to save themselves, believing that if Khrushchev is not stopped before the party congress, he will be practically impregnable.

\* \* \*

Some opposition to the present leadership seems probable. Signs that this opposition is making itself felt have been suggested by such developments as the failure to replace the mysterious announcement and subsequent denial that Malenkov had been promoted to first deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers, the dispute between Pravda and Izvestia over newspaper coverage of the corn program, and the appointment of an alleged "Malenkov man" to head the key propaganda and agitation department of the central committee.

"Rumblings" of this nature could be connected with the following:

1. Malenkov, the deposed chairman of the Council of Ministers, may be able to visualize only further decline for himself unless a successful countermove is effected.

2. Molotov, of course, is in much the same position. A strong feeling for revenge may be motivating this Old Bolshevik, who has been belittled and taunted by his "inferiors," accused of ideological deviation, and censored for his "leftist orientation."

3. There are other elements that may have become disaffected under the Khrushchev-Bulganin leadership.

a. The technocrat managerial element may feel that it has lost considerable ground since Malenkov's removal as head of government.

b. The officer corps of the army may have detected Stalinist leanings on Khrushchev's part, and fear of another Stalin might cause them to join forces with other dissident elements.

c. The planners and economists have reason to worry that investment in marginal projects will hinder the over-all national development.

5  
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d. An isolationist element, if one exists, may be opposed to increasing amounts of foreign aid, especially to non-Orbit countries. Such a group might be composed of leading industrial or agricultural personalities.

e. Provincial party leaders, seeing the spate of replacements of their counterparts in neighboring satrapies, may look favorably upon a stop-Khrushchev movement.

Here then is a potentially disaffected group, a portion of which may have been brought together for purposes of self-preservation. Such a faction would probably decide to act before the party congress in February. They might attempt to organize behind-the-scenes criticism of certain internal policies, such as the corn program, or to arouse opposition to some of the controversial aspects of the Khrushchev-Bulganin trip to South Asia. The ultimate objective would be to prevent a Khrushchev "walk-away" at the congress by focusing attention, ahead of time, on some of his dubious policies. In any case, the outcome of such disagreement might be reflected in important personnel changes at the top.

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III. The collective leadership (possibly no more than four men) is continuing to demonstrate its effective control.

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1. The best ammunition to support this hypothesis is the fact that Khrushchev and Bulganin, along with Serov, the chief of the secret police, felt free to trundle around South Asia for five weeks. The fact is that these are shrewd and experienced "operators" who have had long years of experience in analyzing the political climate, and who undoubtedly are now being aided by several efficient internal intelligence networks.

2. Other signs of confidence have been noted. For instance, the announcement that the 20th Party Congress will be convened in February was made several months ahead of time and included the agenda for the congress, with Bulganin and Khrushchev scheduled to make the key speeches. Similarly, Bulganin and Khrushchev, as the two top Soviet leaders, accepted an invitation to visit Great Britain next spring, some six months in advance. Such relatively long-term commitments as these might well not have been entered into if the leadership question seemed unsettled.

3. There have been several indications that Khrushchev and Mikoyan are particularly close to one another and they have sometimes been put into the category of "cronies." This may be significant since Mikoyan apparently took over the reins of government during the Khrushchev-Bulganin trip.

4. Bulganin's position is undoubtedly one of considerable independent power--but it also seems possible that Bulganin is experiencing both the freedom and the limitation of being a Khrushchev appointee. In any case, the relationship between the two leaders is noticeably friendly.

5. Kaganovich, in his speech at the Revolution anniversary celebration on 6 November, spoke as one fully in accord with current policies.

6. There seems to be a good possibility, therefore, that Khrushchev, Bulganin, Kaganovich, and Mikoyan are not divided. If this is the case, they should be able to maintain control. Only the army leadership, perhaps combined with a Malenkov-Molotov-technocrat faction, could possibly dare to oppose such

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an array of power. There are no indications, however, that the army is in any way disaffected. Thus it seems more likely that if important personnel changes are about to take place, they will affect Molotov or Malenkov rather than the "Khrushchev administration."

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